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Summary of article about women not posting to Wikipedia:

Surveys show that less than fifteen percent of Wikipedia contributors are female, and the Wikimedia foundation has set a goal to increase this to twenty five percent in the next four years. This is an interesting problem, because other online content-upload services seem to be equally balanced by gender (ex. Youtube for videos, Flickr for photos, Yelp for community-based yellow-pages and reviews of businesses, etc.). There are two distinct facets to this disparity: the first is the “relative length of articles and the number of articles that concern ‘womens interests’ [(ex. Friendship bracelets, ‘Sex in the City’)] v.s. articles that concern ‘mens interests’ [(ex. The Simpsons, Grand Theft Auto)]”. The second is the number of women v.s. men who contribute to the encyclopedia overall.

The article proposes that the imbalance comes from the requirement that most contributors must remove, delete, or change the work of others, and that women may be less inclined than men to perform this “destructive” style of work.

The article also brings up the point that it may not make sense to try to increase the number of women contributors just for the sake of increasing the number of women contributors. The issue is that if significant parts of the population are not contributing (and it may not just be gender that is biased against), as wikipedia becomes the de facto source for knowledge and information, the bias of the contributors might influence the quality and diversity of information available on a topic.

The article explains that “from the outside” wikipedia looks like a very diverse collection of information - “a place where all we know is gathered together and made available to all of us equally”, but on the inside it’s a “fight to get one’s voice heard”. Within the discussion pages, there are violent back-and-forth arguments akin to flame-wars where contributors argue the validity of the information they want presented in the article and reasoning for including it. This is very different from YouTube, where there are many “passionate debates”, but nobody’s content is removed in the debate process, or Flickr, where people just upload their own content without complaining about that of others.

Also, Wikipedia will not accept contributions based on personal knowledge – for information to be included, it must be verifiable and backed up with valid sources.

This brings out the difference between the public goals of Wikipedia (“to make all knowledge available to all people through a social and collaborative process of knowledge construction”) and the internal operations of Wikipedia (“one truth may have to be defended against opposing points of view, and one’s words may need to be protected against others who seek to wipe them out”).

The article rationalizes the imbalance (despite “the fact that women now as much as men do, can

express themselves as clearly, and have just as much ability to work collaboratively to construct bodies of knowledge. It is also clear that women can defend their point of view as well as men can. And certainly many women are contentious, fond of debate, and happy to put forward and defend their own points of view.”) with the norms of American society, that “debate, contention, and vigorous defense of one’s position is often still seen as a male stance, and women’s use of these speech styles can call forth negative evaluations.”.

The author goes on to say that women might be judged negatively for such behavior, and that women wishing to participate may not like the idea of debating by erasing others’ work, or want to deal with the stressful argumentation and re-editing.

Conclusions about the two major points I would select from all debaters:

Point 1: Content created relating to “women’s interests” may not have as much “hard fact” to back it up, as much as it’s understood by participants in society and passed down generationally (such as friendship bracelets – there is no “central authority” on the matter to get facts from, just personal experience). It is thus easier for articles to be promoted, improved, and expanded when there is more “hard fact”, such as supporting websites, multimedia content, literature, or scientific research.

Point 2: Men are more likely to not lose interest in the debate style, as society says men should act like that but women should not. As society “looks down” on women who act in such a manner, female contributors are less likely to stay motivated and participating in the style Wikipedia promotes, because of social pressures to interact differently and accordingly with what is expected in the “real world”, governed by emotions and human interaction, relative to the “online world” where people are just entities adding or removing text from an online website. It is unfortunate that our current society acts this way, but it’s the result of thousands of years of human society, which grew out of evolutionary behaviors for survival.